

Planting Cherry Trees

The sweet cherry produces larger sized trees about 30 to 40 feet tall. The branches grow in an upright position and are more tolerant of low temperatures than peach trees and when happy can live for more than a century. They will have fewer, but larger leaves than tart cherry trees.

The tart cherry is sometimes called a red cherry or sour cherry. They are smaller (15 to 20 feet tall) and more spreading usually without the strong central leader. It has a more bush like appearance with thinner limbs. They are very cold hardy, but shorter lived than their counter parts the sweet cherry.

Tart cherry trees are self-fertile and do not require another tree for pollination. The sweet cherry trees do require a cross pollinator which must be a tart cherry. Black Tartarian is one that is often used for cross pollinating. Note: a sweet cherry WILL NOT pollinate with another sweet cherry tree.

Soil tests should be used to determine if the soil pH needs to be amended. The phosphorous and potassium levels should be adequate. Apply lime and fertilizer as recommended from the soil test results.

Planting:

Tart cherry trees being small are spaced 14 to 18 feet apart with rows about 16 to 20 feet apart. Sweet cherry trees grow larger and should be spaced 16 to 20 feet apart with rows 22 to 26 apart.

Dig a hole 18 inches deep and equally wide. Place the roots in the hole, while holding the grafted area about 3 inches above the soil line and fill the hole with soil. About half way filling the hole, lightly tamp the soil, and resume filling the hole. Water with approximately 2 gallons of water to secure the tree and remove any air pockets in the soil. Once the hole settles, more soil may need to be applied to bring it up to level. A cylinder of hardware cloth about 12 inches tall

can be loosely placed around the base of the trees to prevent rabbits from feeding on the trunks, especially during winter.

Water the tree(s) every second week during the first year planted unless there has been enough rainfall to equal at least 1 inch. Use herbicides or manual labor to eliminate weeds and grass within 3 to 4 feet of the trunk.

Note: Organic mulches conserve moisture and eliminate weeds, but as the material decomposes nitrogen is released. High levels of nitrogen are not desirable during the late summer because of they may delay the development of cold hardiness. Mulches also provide excellent habitat for rodents that feed on tree roots and bark. For those reasons organic mulches are not recommended. Wood chips or straw can be used, but should be removed by November to discourage wildlife from bothering the tree.

Use herbicides

Fertilizing:

If the soil was properly amended before planting, nitrogen should be the only nutrient that needs to be applied on an annual basis. Fertilize the trees two times (2 weeks after planting and 6 weeks after planting) with a nitrogen fertilizer or a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 or 5-10-10 or other formulation at the rate of 0.05 pounds of actual nitrogen per tree application. The amount of fertilizer per tree varies depending on the formulation. To avoid root injury, place fertilizer in a band 6 to 8 inches from the trunk around the tree. Organic forms of fertilizer (manure, blood meal or bone meal) are not recommended due to the nutrimental analysis being usually unavailable and that those nutrients may be released throughout the season. Trees require high levels of nitrogen early in the season and low levels are needed during the late summer.

Pruning:

Pruning is an important part of the fruiting process and should be done correctly for the best production. Here is an excellent link to Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service. Within the informational pages is detailed advice on properly pruning your cherry trees.

<http://www.hort.purdue.edu/ext/HO-9.pdf>